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## Abenomics' Effect on Gender Inequality in Japanese Society and the Workplace

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# ***Abenomics' Effect on Gender Inequality in Japanese Society and the Workplace***

An Honors Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Honors in *Political Science and International Studies*.

By  
*Arianna C. Johnson*

Under the mentorship of *Dr. Christopher M. Brown*

## **ABSTRACT**

In this study, I determine the extent to which Japan's shrinking workforce population has been affected by gender roles. Many Asian countries are experiencing a prominent decline in birth rate and population, which has increased global interest in these issues. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Japanese government officials have eagerly responded, pushing Japanese women into the labor force as a possible solution. However, this decision has unanticipated drawbacks, which requires officials to address Japanese women's concerns in and outside of the workplace. I argue that the Japanese government will have more success by addressing these needs, creating a more gender-equal society for Japanese women. I seek to find the relationships between gender roles and the prominent decrease in births and labor force participation rates. In order to test this hypothesis, I analyze the legislation in regards to gender equality passed by Japanese prime ministers, Yoshihiko Noda and Shinzo Abe, from 2011-2020. I measure the amount of legislation passed, the effectiveness of the legislation, and Japanese women's reaction to the legislation. This paper utilizes current literature and former legislation to determine whether women would have a more equal role in society if their concerns (involving pregnancy and work environment) were addressed.

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## Introduction

By the end of 2019, Japan's birth rate had declined at such a rapid pace that the total population shrunk by 500,000 people. Ben Dooley<sup>1</sup>, a writer from the *New York Times*, claims that the birth rate had not been this low since 1874. Over the past few decades, Japan's rapidly shrinking birth rate has been a major concern domestically and internationally. Throughout Japan, towns and villages are disappearing "as young people choose to not have children or move to urban areas in search of better employment opportunities".<sup>2</sup> Japan realizes this will have a devastating effect on their future workforce population, which will decrease the overall effectiveness of its future economy. The lack of resources available for childcare services has also been a huge contributor to this problem, making it even more difficult for parents to balance work and family life.

These issues have led the former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to create several policies in hopes of creating a booming workforce, setting the target goals to be met by 2020. But as of September 2020, these policies have not had the desired effect. It is unknown what direction Japan will select, especially with the occurrence of unforeseen events like the COVID-19 outbreak during 2020. Shinzo Abe had three major policies that targeted Japan's economic sector, one of which targeted women specifically. These policies, labeled "Abenomics" by scholars<sup>3</sup>, encouraged women to join the workforce and provided more resources to balance

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<sup>1</sup> Dooley, Ben. (2019) "Japan Shrinks by 500,000 People as Births Fall to Lowest Number Since 1874". *The New York Times*.

<sup>2</sup> Dooley, Ben. (2019) "Japan Shrinks by 500,000 People as Births Fall to Lowest Number Since 1874". *The New York Times*.

<sup>3</sup> Chanlett-Avery, E & Nelson, R.M. (2014) "Womenomics" In Japan: In Brief. *Current Politics and Economics of Northern and Western Asia*. 23 (4), 411.

work and familial responsibilities.<sup>4</sup> Shinzo Abe believes women have the pivotal role in determining Japan's future birth rate. But are working Japanese women actually the key to Japan's booming success? From the perspectives of scholars educated on this topic, the answer varies. However, some scholars believe this approach is not necessarily the quintessential answer.

Japanese men and women offer distinct roles within their workplace and society. Japanese men are the patriarchs, often being expected to make most of the decisions. On the opposite end of the spectrum, Japanese women are expected to be the caregivers of their households. Women are expected to be reserved in situations, which forces the men (most times) to make the decision. These basic "role-descriptions" offer an insight into Japan's patriarchally-rooted system. These characteristics are moreover present outside households, often taking place in workplace environments as well. Because of this, I chose to analyze the effects of gender roles on the Japanese workforce population. Specifically, to what extent has Japan's shrinking workforce population been affected by gender roles?

Women have the biggest disadvantage in this workplace culture, mainly because they must balance work and housework daily. Because of these expected roles, women are forced to take more leaves of absence than men. This, of course, leads to them facing the brunt of the backlash from their co-workers. In some instances, Japanese women are eventually forced to quit their jobs because they are expected to fulfill both tasks effectively. In comparison to other developed countries, Japan's workforce quickly replaces workers in situations where it is needed. This makes it nearly impossible for Japanese women to return to their jobs afterward. The

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<sup>4</sup> Chanlett-Avery, E & Nelson, R.M. (2014) "Womenomics" In Japan: In Brief. Current Politics and Economics of Northern and Western Asia. 23 (4), 411.

addition of Japan's lack of childcare services creates a more burdensome set of issues. I argue that if the Japanese government focused on social prejudices against women, Japanese women would have more comfortable lives as mothers and working-class citizens. If women had more opportunities available to balance taking care of their families and work, then the birth rate would increase.

These issues attached to working women are not only affecting Japan's infrastructure, but the infrastructure of neighboring countries, like South Korea and China, as well. However, there is a stark difference with South Korea and China: these issues are not nearly as prominent. Unlike these countries, Japan's declining birth rate has drastically affected other sectors of its infrastructure. The education sector, for example, will be heavily affected by having less children to attend their schools. This will eventually create less demand for educators and childcare services, leaving these workers with fewer job opportunities. To combat their depleting workforce population, Japan has considered two alternatives: importing machinery and immigrants. Both options will create serious implications, which will force Japan to tread carefully. Regardless, many scholars believe that Japanese gender roles have affected the current trends to a degree. Thus, I believe more research is needed in this area to analyze these connections and create better-suited solutions.

## **Literature Review**

Japan has always had a tumultuous history with its gender relations. The roles of gender have constantly changed throughout Japan's history. But after World War II, women in East Asia were eventually granted more legal rights regarding taxation and property. However, a lot of these women continued to have low status in their societies. Many of these gender norms are still

placed on East Asian women today. Therefore, the central theme of this paper involves detangling the gender relations of society in East Asia. I argue that once this is looked into, Japan's case will be easier to understand. However, this theme can vary in approach and direction. This led me to split the theme into three subcategories: Gender Stereotypes in Japanese Society, Feminism, and Womenomics. The "Gender Stereotypes in Japanese Society" section describes the challenges Japanese women face daily, specifically in a workplace environment. The scholars' input regarding the needs of these women is also mentioned in this section. The "Feminism" section mainly discusses the scholars' interpretation of feminism and the requirements to maintain feminism. This section also introduces the "transnational business feminism" concept, which is currently utilized in Abe's policies. The last section, "Womenomics and Abenomics" concentrates on other scholars' interpretations of Womenomics and reveals the consensus on Abenomics.

### *Gender Stereotypes in Japanese Society*

Many scholars find that Japan's depleting birth rate has been affected by strong gender roles attached to Japanese men and women. Noriko Tsuya, for instance, believes that this is the result of two effects: less availability of financially stable Japanese bachelors and dismayed Japanese women avoiding future housework responsibilities.<sup>5</sup> In terms of the latter, Tsuya found that there is a significant difference in the amount of housework (including childcare) completed weekly between both sexes. She believes that a flexible, family-friendly workplace is required to meet the demands of Japanese women today, balancing work and housework.

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<sup>5</sup> Tsuya, N.O. (2017) Low Fertility in Japan—No End in Sight. *AsiaPacific Issues*. (131), 1.

Fellow scholars reached a consensus: stronger policies are required in order to receive the desired results. Masayo Matsuzaki and their colleagues sent a questionnaire to a random sample of 530 pregnant women in a Tokyo medical facility.<sup>6</sup> These questionnaires were distributed between July and August 2004. These questions asked respondents about their lifestyle choices, employment status, and personal characteristics. The recorded responses revealed many Japanese women's lifestyle habits depended on their work status. Because of this, the responses varied. One question revealed that the employed pregnant women were prone to less sleeping time than the unemployed pregnant women in the study. These diverse results confirmed the demand for a more flexible system to accommodate these needs.

Because of their reserved nature, Japanese women are also frequent targets of harassment. Distinct from other developed countries, claims of sexual harassment and “matahara” (the Japanese term for perpetrators bullying employed women for being pregnant) have almost no repercussions. Emma Dalton proves this phenomenon still occurs frequently in the Japanese government system. In her work, she describes the experience of a female lawmaker who was heckled by her male counterparts while publicly speaking about the hardships of working women.<sup>7</sup> This spectacle sent the public into an uproar, forcing the hecklers to issue apologetic sentiments. However, no further action was taken. This led Dalton to argue that the lack of awareness and intensity of these perpetrators creates a very destructive environment for women in the workplace and government.

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<sup>6</sup> Matsuzaki, M., Haruna, M., Ota, E., Murayama, R. & Murashima, S. (2011) Factors related to the continuation of employment during pregnancy among Japanese women. *Japan Journal of Nursing Science*. 8(2), 154.

<sup>7</sup> Dalton, E. (2019) A Feminist critical discourse analysis of sexual harassment in the Japanese political and media worlds. *Women's Studies International Forum*. 77 (102276), 4.



Thankfully, it seems that Japanese women are attempting to refute the patriarchal system Japan has established. A questionnaire was sent out by Irina and Paula-Alexandria Roibu following a public speech on “women empowerment”, delivered by Shinzo Abe, to a random selection of respondents.<sup>8</sup> These questions varied widely but each highlighted both genders’ places in society and opinions on employment positions for both genders. These questions included (but were not limited to) opinions on types of jobs that are suitable for women, working women in general, and a man’s place in society. From the responses, they found several women realized their low position in the “workplace hierarchy”. These same respondents claimed to have noticed the increased frequency of promotions given to women, but co-workers have rarely respected these new promotions. Men are identified as the “leaders” of these corporations, leaving less tolerance of female executives from male co-workers. In response to a question referring to the importance of the “women empowerment” movement, most of the responses indicated that this initiative was beneficial. From their perspective, this will promote diversity within the workforce, giving women more chances to display their (often unnoticed) potential. Once again, Roibu and her colleague believe that if this patriarchal system were modified to include women, women would have a much more positive experience in the workplace.<sup>9</sup>

### *Feminism*

Many proposals Shinzo Abe recommended were based on popular feminist ideals. According to Duchamp, “feminism cannot survive without creating a minimal belief in the

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<sup>8</sup> Roibu, I. & Roibu (Crucianu), P. (2016) Women Empowerment in Japan: policies and public’s reaction. *Bulletin of the Transilvania University of Brasov, Series IV: Philology & Cultural Studies*. 9(2), 133-140.

<sup>9</sup> Roibu, I. & Roibu (Crucianu), P. (2016) Women Empowerment in Japan: policies and public’s reaction. *Bulletin of the Transilvania University of Brasov, Series IV: Philology & Cultural Studies*. 9(2), 133-140.

ability of feminism to change the structures of our world.”<sup>10</sup> Combining past (and current) activists' work as well as legitimately believing in the “power” of feminism is the catalyst that spreads these ideas. Duchamp believes that feminism must be shared to empower future generations, convincing them to believe and utilize these practices to change the infrastructure in their lives.

Feminism has other concepts attached to its general definition. In the case of Shinzo Abe's policies, he is utilizing transnational business feminism. Transnational business feminism is a term coined by Adrienne Roberts, which states that “multinational corporations, non-government organizations, and international financial institutions have decided that the women of the world constitute an untapped resource.”<sup>11</sup> As I mentioned before, his policies mainly attempt to repair Japan's economic sector, hence why his policies centered around women give incentives to those that stay and thrive in the workforce. The main issue involves the factors transnational feminism does not consider. Hester Eisenstein, another scholar, came to this conclusion after he reviewed many reports from economic companies (like Goldman Sachs).

The women forcibly drawn into the workforce are practically expected to abandon their housework responsibilities. Biases are shown with this sentiment because lower-class families cannot be forced into the economic sector, leaving most of the participants to be from middle and upper-class families. This concept also disregards the effects' impact on Japan's economic sector and international presence. This led Eisenstein to conclude that males should be more accepting of this new women's movement and stand with them on these issues in the workplace.

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<sup>10</sup> Duchamp, L.T. (1986) Saving Feminism: Reflections & Projections, Past/Present/Future. *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*. 8 (3), 117.

<sup>11</sup> Eisenstein, H. (2017) Hegemonic Feminism, Neoliberalism and Womenomics: 'Empowerment' Instead of Liberation? *New Formations*. (91), 38.

### *Womenomics & Abenomics*

Womenomics is a concept termed by Kathy Matsui and her colleagues at Goldman Sachs Japan in 1999. In this report, she argued that Japan's depleting workforce population could be solved by raising the female work participation rate, henceforth increasing the Gross Domestic Product (GDP).<sup>12</sup> This idea has been applied to other countries as well, but the main focus for this approach has been centered on Japan. This is the concept that Shinzo Abe attempted to implement in his policies, which scholars refer to as Abenomics.

However, most scholars would argue this legislation is not enough. Other factors including (but not limited to) office etiquette and traditional gender roles hinder the effectiveness of Abe's policies.<sup>13</sup> Macnaughtan makes this conclusion as well by using graphs from the Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training (JILPT), Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and Gender Equality Bureau to compare workplace participation rates by gender and age. Within the graphs, Macnaughtan found that there has been an increase of females entering the workforce. However, the dip in the M-shaped curve is a representation of how children and wife duties are a blockage of continuous employment for these women. This is very different from other countries in the OECD, where the labor force participation rates for women between 25-64 are much higher. This is further proof that employment needs "diversity and flexibility while reducing precariousness, to seek to promote sustainability, wellbeing, and equality for both sexes."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Macnaughtan, H. (2015) Womenomics for Japan: is the Abe policy for gendered employment viable in an era of precarity? *The Asia-Pacific Journal*. 13 (13), 1.

<sup>13</sup> Chanlett-Avery, E & Nelson, R.M. (2014) "Womenomics" In Japan: In Brief. *Current Politics and Economics of Northern and Western Asia*. 23 (4), 411.

<sup>14</sup> Macnaughtan, H. (2015) Womenomics for Japan: is the Abe policy for gendered employment viable in an era of precarity? *The Asia-Pacific Journal*. 13 (13), 16.

Meanwhile, Jiyeoun Song and other scholars concurred that these initiatives for female employment have been targeting highly educated Japanese females instead of the female Japanese workforce as a whole.<sup>15</sup> The future of the world's economy is dependent on the female population. An article from *the Economist* compares the influence women have on their workforce infrastructure in Japan to developed countries in the West. The United States, Germany, and Italy are some of the countries included in the study. Because different parts of the workforce were observed and tested, the results varied. However, the overall result of this writer's findings implied that the addition of women to the labor market could provide a better base for long-term growth. This would then help finance countries' welfare states and boost the incomes of those in the developing world.<sup>16</sup>

While expanding my knowledge of the Womenomics concept, I found a lack of information in some parts of the research. There were a scarce number of resources describing the effect of Abenomics in low-income households. Most of the women analyzed in the literature mentioned acquired secondary education and/or resided in a stable income-based family. It is also evident that the literature mentioned relied on the experiences of full-time workers, rather than part-time workers. In actuality, most Japanese women have part-time jobs because of the less flexible system utilized by full-time employment companies. Therefore, I have not been able to determine the effect of Abenomics on part-time employers. It surprised me to discover the lack of literature referring to Japanese men's perception of these ideals. I speculate this is because Womenomics' primary focus is the female Japanese population. However, I do think it is important to gather the opinions of the men as well, seeing as how they will also be somewhat

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<sup>15</sup> Song, J. (2015) Economic Empowerment of Women as the Third Arrow of Abenomics. *Journal of International and Area Studies*. 22 (1), 127.

<sup>16</sup> *The Economist* (2006) Finance and Economics: A guide to womenomics; Women and the world economy. The Economist Intelligence Unit. 379 (8473).

affected by these regulations. Previously, I referred to Irina and Paula-Alexandria Roibu's work because their study included both male and female respondents. However, this is the only encounter I had with the male population's reaction to Abenomics, making it difficult to completely understand their viewpoint.

In this paper, I analyzed the Japanese public's reactions to these policies. I believed I had a slight advantage since the target goals were aimed to be met by the year 2020. Thus, I believed I would make more precise predictions about how the Japanese people would respond, which was a factor that was previously limited in the literature. However, I thought that some of the information might be skewed a certain way because of the COVID-19 pandemic that has taken place. If I did not consider this factor, it could have been difficult to tell which parts of the data I collected were only affected by Abe's policies (without outside interferences). I completed this analysis by comparing the reaction to Abenomics to attempts by the previous prime minister to enforce women's rights and increase the birth rate. In order to accomplish this, I referred to data records submitted by the Japanese governments to determine how they were received.

## **Theory**

To understand the impact of gender relations in Japan, I must re-state the research question for this study: To what extent has Japan's shrinking workforce population been affected by gender roles? The short answer to this question would be that gender roles have majorly affected Japan's shrinking workforce, which would probably be a shocking realization to the average person. Even though this may not be fully realized by the workers involved and those observing this case, a country's social hierarchy structure is brought into the workplace's structure unintentionally. This structure could emulate these societal characteristics in many forms: who is allowed to have which types of jobs, how these workers are treated in the

workplace, etc. If there is a noticeable difference in these instances, it directly translates into how the social hierarchy works. In Japan, the workplace environment clearly shows the discrepancies between Japanese men and women. The expectations and treatment of both groups differ in a lot of ways, which was a concept I frequently mentioned in the literature review. This is a reason why many scholars believe that changes in the workplace need to occur if any significant changes for Japan's economy and society could happen. This is why I hypothesize that if the Japanese government's treatment of gender relations (between both groups) were less divisive and more enforced, then the workplace environment would be more equal towards men and women.

In this study, the independent variable (X) is the effect of gender relations. I believe that gender relations play a role in how workplace environments are conducted. But what exactly do I mean by the term, "gender relations?" From my perspective, gender relations are characteristics or stereotypes placed on groups solely because of their gender. This concept leaves out many other factors like education levels, economic status, etc. Regardless of the implications, gender relations have some effect on all societies. In some instances, these differences between men and women are less apparent and dramatic. However, they still exist. In some of the indigenous cultures studied by scholars, women and men are equal groups within society, one group does not dominate the other. However, both groups still might be expected to have different societal roles. For women, this is often portrayed as them taking care of the family and home, sometimes food gathering is also included. While for men, these roles often involved labored work and hunting for their people. In some cases, these "expected roles" could be translated onto the other group. This meant that these people could complete jobs they originally would not be expected to do because of their gender. However, this type of "switching" is much less likely to occur in

societies most would deem “developed”. This is the case for Japan, where Japanese men reported feeling judged by their peers for taking paternity leave to care for their children. Part of this reason is that Japan has a stigmatized view of work ethic and leave of absences. But, Japanese men are not expected to conduct childcare, most believe that men should only focus on work and providing money for their families. This notion forces Japanese women to balance work and familial responsibilities equally, without giving men the same expectations.

The dependent variable (Y) I will be analyzing is the Japanese workplace environment. As I have mentioned in previous sections, Japanese women are always expected to be reserved and respectful, especially when in the presence of men. In Japan’s social hierarchy, women are a disadvantaged group in this system. This is especially the case for women from lower-class families and/or single-mother households. These women are expected to balance work and familial responsibilities, expected to give equal attention to both roles. But the Japanese workforce’s characteristic of rapidly replacing workers that left provided another challenge for Japanese women. Many Japanese people have complained about how quickly their jobs can be taken once they leave, which is especially true for those on maternity leave. With this disadvantage and added responsibilities to balance (that their male counterparts do not have), Japanese women are more often than not forced to take time off without many alternatives available. This struggle is more apparent for Japanese women with part-time jobs, which is the most common type of job for Japanese people to have. Part-time jobs are often replaced much faster than full-time jobs due to the lack of experience and expertise needed to serve in most of these jobs. These part-time jobs also pay less, meaning that Japanese women would have to find alternative means for income if their job is taken. While already difficult for most, this task can be especially difficult for women who are single mothers.

This discussion eventually leads to another important question: why do gender relations affect the workplace environment? At the beginning of this study, I previously mentioned that the workplace environment behavior and norms often reflect societal views on both genders and displays their roles in society. These societal norms are not forgotten when entering a workplace environment, in fact, these ideas are usually heightened. Therefore, I argue that a lot of these problems originate from the societal standards in place. As people grow and live in society, these ideas are imprinted on their minds, leading them to base their decisions and beliefs on these ideas. Personally, I believe this argument is one of the reasons why Shinzo Abe's "Abenomics" policies were not substantial. These policies were arguably created for the benefit of Japanese women and the economy, but these policies need more reach towards their "targets" for bigger changes to be shown.

*H1: If the Japanese workplace environment's gender relations were less divisive and regulations regarding this were more enforced, the Japanese workplace environment would be more gender equal.*

Over time, I believe that the current attitudes within Japanese society have become more liberal than previous generations. The public seems more receptive to daily inequalities women face, sometimes resulting in backlash to the "aggressors" in these conflicts. However, I still believe that more needs to be done. I argue that these policies need to create a space for the people to change their thinking. If this is not challenged in any way, they would naturally feel that they have no reason to change their ways of thinking. This would then explain why these new ideas of gender equality and issues that are more focused on women are not received well, leading to little change in Japanese women's experience in the workplace. This concept is especially important for Japanese men to understand, specifically the ones in prominent positions



in these companies. Men are the ones that will be interacting with Japanese women in these settings, especially since many of these social practices are reinforced by the men around them. I believe the men in these prominent positions are definitely some of the people whose ideologies need to change in this regard. I believe that if the men in these positions believe in more ideas for creating a gender-equal working environment, the men in the lower positions will tend to follow suit. In theory, this could create a better workplace environment for their female co-workers.

### **Research Design**

Through my research design, I measured the amount of legislation passed (and its success rate) in regards to gender equality between 2011 and 2018. I measured the success rate by the trends of Japan's Economic Participation and Opportunity Index and the Global Gender Index. Through my previous research experience, I found it difficult to find information in regards to women's responses to these types of reforms. Therefore, unless scholars have had direct contact with these groups of Japanese women that were impacted, their responses to this legislation are relatively unknown. This shows the importance of the Economic Participation and Opportunity Index and the Global Gender Index in the study. The Economic Participation & Opportunity Index measures the number of women (per country) that actively participate in the economic sector and the availability of these opportunities to participate. Meanwhile, the Global Gender Index uses a broader approach by calculating the gender gap of each country to essentially rank them in terms of gender equality. These indicators provide some form of data to measure the gap between both genders. Again, because direct access to Japanese women for this study was limited, these indicators played a vital role in this process. This research process also allowed me to eliminate as many biases as possible for the study. With most of the information originating

from Japan's official governmental records, there were not many biases present overall. This forced me to focus on the facts only, not opinions.

In order to make the study more feasible, I focused on gender-equal legislation passed under Japan's two most recent prime ministers: Yoshihiko Noda and Shinzo Abe. Yoshihiko Noda was the prime minister of Japan from 2011 to 2012 and was a representative of the Democratic Party of Japan. His most notable policies involved nuclear policy, the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the Senkaku Islands, and creating increases on the consumption tax. On the other hand, Shinzo Abe was the most recent prime minister of Japan (at the time of the study). He was also the longest-serving prime minister, serving from 2012-2020. Because he was in the official office for a long amount of time, he had much more legislation passed under his terms than Yoshihiko had. Before he was sworn into office, no representatives from the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan had been prime minister since 2008. I believed this would be an interesting sample to look at because they could possibly have different reasons and strategies for the policies implemented (or different policies in general) because of personal differences and/or from being from different political parties.

But what exactly is the difference between the Democratic Party and the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan? The Democratic Party of Japan aims to create a flexible system that values people's individuality and vitality. Meanwhile, the Liberal Democratic Party tends to be more conservative in its policies, often focusing on nationalist ideas. Overall, the population of this study was the legislation passed under the prime ministers of Japan. The sample of the study would be the gender-equal legislation passed under the last two prime ministers, Yoshihiko Noda and Shinzo Abe.

Now, there are many definitions and ideas of what the term, gender equality, means. In political science, the exact definition has been fought over by different scholars in the field for many years (and will most likely continue to do so). However, I would like to use Dr. Obah-Akpowoghaha and Dr. Ojakorotu's definition of gender equality in their study of the United Nations. I used this definition to determine which types of legislation were enforcing gender equality, which I later analyzed within this study. By their definition, gender equality is where "all human beings are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by stereotypes, rigid gender roles or prejudice."<sup>17</sup> In other words, I focused on Japanese legislation that attempted to eliminate the gender inequality "divide" through its policies. The policies in question did not necessarily only have to target Japanese women. When selecting the legislation to analyze, I could have also used policies that specifically targeted men instead, or even both genders to ensure both groups have equal opportunity. Regardless of the "target population", or group the legislation was aimed at and intended for, I placed these types of legislation under "gender-equality legislation" if it met the requirements previously mentioned.

This study is based on two characteristics of the legislation: the response to the legislation and the success rate of the legislation. The first phase of the study analyzed the response to the legislation, while the second phase measured the success rate of the legislation. I believe that these are very important to analyze because (1) we need to understand the reasoning behind current "gender-equal" legislation shortcomings and (2) understand how accepting the Japanese people are to these policies. Thus, this stresses the importance of the Economic Participation &

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<sup>17</sup> Obah-Akpowoghaha, N.G. & Ojakorotu, V. "The United Nations and the Struggle for Gender Equality in Global Politics: Challenges and Prospect." *Gender & Behaviour* 17, no. 3, p. 13596.

Opportunity Index and the Global Gender Index. These indexes provided insight into how effective these policies and how accepted these policies were by Japanese companies.

In the case of measuring the second phase, I believe this is a pivotal reason for the shortcomings of Shinzo Abe's "Abenomics" policies. As I discussed in the literature review, the Japanese government influenced many companies in the public sector to adopt Abenomics by giving them incentives that would benefit their businesses. Compared to prime ministers before him, Shinzo Abe made substantial strides for women by passing this legislation.<sup>18</sup> However, because these were incentives and not regulations, companies were not forced to adopt these policies. Instead, these companies were often only encouraged. I believe this is also the reason for the private sector not showing much improvement and rarely adopted Abenomics. Not only would they not feel pressured to follow these regulations under this system, but their workers also felt they had no reason to practice these regulations in their workplace. If not forced, the male workers would have no incentive themselves to be more supportive of their female co-workers. I argue that if every male had this negative attitude in a given company, very little change (or none at all) would be made. Therefore, I believe that if the Japanese government were more attentive to public reaction regarding their policies, they would have a better idea of the aspects that could be improved for future legislation. Thus, in theory, creating legislation that would be successful and create the changes intended. This is also another reason that the legislation analyzed in this study was centered on those that affect the workplace environment. Again, these pieces of legislation did not necessarily need to only be workplace-oriented to be observed, but those that are were more likely to be included in the study.

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<sup>18</sup> Song, J. (2015) Economic Empowerment of Women as the Third Arrow of Abenomics. *Journal of International and Area Studies*. 22 (1), 127.

The control variables utilized were that the Economic Participation & Opportunity Index and the Global Gender Index were only taken from the same source (the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap reports), during the same time frame (2011-2018). I also analyzed the same characteristics for each country in this case study. This approach ensured that these percentages/ratios are calculated in the exact same manner, creating little discrepancies. Because I only focused on "gender-equal" legislation passed under Yoshihiko Noda and Shinzo Abe, only responses recorded during this time frame were analyzed. These control variables helped determine whether the success rate and/or responses changed in any way. If so, I also determined if there is a negative, positive, or no correlation associated with the results.

The methods I used required data sources from official, Japanese governmental websites. I chose this method because I wanted to eliminate the possibility of inaccurate information (which is more likely to occur when using unofficial sources). These sources can include information from official organizations that encourage gender equality under the Japanese government. These organizations previously mentioned in the literature review, like the Gender Bureau and the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development, offer free access to basic statistical data sets regarding gender relations. I found that these organizations have valuable information that essentially aided this research study. Using these sources provided a valuable, yet accurate, analysis of the data. Another positive implication of analyzing the data during Yoshihiko Noda and Shinzo Abe's terms is that the information was not skewed by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. If I had not taken the term selections into account, the effects of Abe's policies (without outside interferences) would have been difficult to prove effectively.

For the methodology portion of this study, I used a “mixed-method” approach. As part of the qualitative approach portion, I give a summary of the legislation under this study. This study also included some statistical analysis for the quantitative approach portion of the study. The statistical analysis was used when comparing Japan’s statistics to other countries in the study. Because the variables for this study are not clear in definition, I have created designations for the success and failures of each variable. In terms of the success rate, the legislation would be “successful” if the change they intended had a significant impact (40% and above). If changes below this rate occurred or the result moved in a different direction than what the legislation intended, it is a “failure”. When later making conclusions from the results, an improvement (or positive correlation) could argue that women are getting more representation or better treatment through the legislation in question. And more importantly, it would show that Japanese women are accepting these policies from the government. This is also the reason I chose to focus on the two most recent prime ministers’ legislation and the indexes previously mentioned, hopefully showing that whether or not Japan’s policies towards women were done previously and if they were actually successful. These changes (if prominent) would be an encouraging sign (not only for scholars) but also for working, Japanese women. However, the results could have been a discouraging sign for these groups. This would confirm the sentiments of Japanese women all-along: more change is needed.

This study also revealed whether gender inequality was or was not an important issue that the government was trying to combat earlier in Japan’s history or if this was a recent change. If the numbers of legislation involving gender inequality rose during this period, it proved that the Japanese are taking these issues more seriously. As mentioned previously, Shinzo Abe has already created a major policy shift towards empowering Japanese women. I also think that this

approach showed the difference between the approaches between different political parties. Specifically, the Democratic Party and the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan. However, this difference (if any) does not necessarily come from different political perspectives because these men are two different people as well. This means that they could just want Japan to go in different directions. Overall, I do think this possible contrast was beneficial to explore, even if the outcome was different from my initial expectations.

### **Analysis**

Overall, I found that not much improvement was made regarding gender-equal legislation. As I discuss later on, the legislation that was passed under this time frame was limited. Many of these policies were changed or delayed, which left little room for improvement. I also found that the legislation mentioned was not necessarily enforced in these environments. The Japanese government often recommended or encouraged these policies to be effectively adopted, which would be a less effective motive for these companies to enforce them. Based on these general observations, I believe that the theory I presented was correct in its assumptions. I believe that if these policies were enforced and not delayed, more improvement would have been made.

From the research I did on Yoshihiko Noda, the prime minister from 2011-2012, it seems that not much legislation was passed while he was in office. However, Yoshihiko Noda was improving and changing laws that were already in place regarding gender equality. One example of this is the “Third Basic Plan for Gender Equality”, which was created in 2005, and the Civil Code and Family Registration Law. In November 2012, Noda met with the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination of Women to discuss possible changes to these pieces of

legislation. At the end of the meeting, Noda agreed that he would continue to discuss amendments to these documents with “the Diet members of the ruling party, although there were varying opinions on the issue.”<sup>19</sup> I also found that Yoshihiko Noda seemed to attend many conferences and allowed Japan to join some international committees that promote the spread of gender equality and women’s rights. Japan joined the UN Women organization as a member state. Although the exact date of when Japan joined is unknown, this had to have taken place sometime between July 2010 (when the organization was created) and 2011 (Japan was already donating at this point). Japan is currently still part of this committee and has become one of the most active member states. I found it interesting that so little legislation regarding gender equality and/or women’s empowerment was passed under his term. However, because his term only lasted one year (from 2011-2012), that could possibly be an explanation for this. I still found the situation interesting because his party, the Democratic Party of Japan, aimed to create more legislation that promotes individual freedom and a flexible government system. I would have assumed that because this is the main goal of the party and gender equality would technically fall under this category, more legislation or attempts for change would have been implemented. The processes and changes that were in progress at the time seemed to move very slowly, which forced me to conclude that this issue was not a top priority.

Under Shinzo Abe, there were policies passed in order to promote gender equality, specifically in the workforce and political systems. As I have mentioned multiple times already, a lot of these laws were part of Shinzo Abe’s Abenomics initiative. However, there were some laws that stuck out from this group: the Gender Parity Law, the Fourth Basic Plan for Gender

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<sup>19</sup> “Additional Information Regarding the Response by the Government of Japan on the Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW/C/JPN/CO/6).” MOFA. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, November 2012.



Equality, the Act on Promotion of the Women's Participation and Advancement in the Workplace, and the Intensive Policy to Accelerate the Empowerment of Women. The Gender Parity Law recommended political parties in Japan to have an equal number of male and female legislators in each individual party.<sup>20</sup> The Fourth Basic Plan for Gender Equality was a plan that expanded from the Third Basic Plan for Gender Equality, which I previously stated that Yoshihiko Noda was trying to expand upon before leaving office. This law was approved by the Cabinet in 2015, focusing on “labor reforms, fostered women's recruitment and empowerment, support to women faced with difficult situations, and enhanced measures to combat violence against women.”<sup>21</sup> In May and April of 2016, two more laws were passed: The Act on Promotion of Women's Participation and Advancement in the Workplace and The Intensive Policy to Accelerate the Empowerment of Women. Both policies attempted to ease the burden of working Japanese women currently in the workforce and for those trying to enter the workforce. One of the policies in particular, the Act on Promotion of Women's Participation and Advancement in the Workplace, worked to “provide women with opportunities for employment and promotion and giving full consideration to the impact of traditional practices in the workplaces.”<sup>22</sup> In contrast, the Intensive Policy to Accelerate the Empowerment of Women had less specific goals: “increase women's participation in economic activities in all sectors, creating a safe and secure environment that supports women's empowerment, and improving the basis for women's

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<sup>20</sup> Schieder, Chelsea Szendi. “Japan's Upper House Is No Place for a Woman.” *Foreign Affairs*, April 16, 2020.

<sup>21</sup> “Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women Examines Reports of Japan.” OHCHR. United Nations Human Rights. Accessed February 2, 2021.

<sup>22</sup> Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office. (2016) The Act on Promotion of Women's Participation and Advancement in the Workplace (Partial enforcement on 4 September, 2015 / Fully enforcement on 1 April, 2016). 1-2.

empowerment.”<sup>23</sup> Because Shinzo Abe had more opportunities to pass legislation (more time and the party focuses on improving the entire nation), it is not surprising that more legislation was passed under his term. However, as you will see, it was disappointing to see that these policies were virtually ineffective despite having more opportunities for improvement.

### *Data Results from the Subindexes*

To create data sets for these indexes (the Global Gender Index and the Economic Participation and Opportunity Index), I looked into the annual Global Gender Gap Index Report from 2011-2018. I compiled the data from these indexes into tables listed below. I then created graphs for both indexes using the information from these tables. The World Economic Forum, the source of these Global Gender Gap reports, listed each country’s ranking on a scale from zero to one. When looking at the tables I created, this value is the first number listed in each box. The number next to this is the global ranking for each country listed. The lower the number is, the lower their score for each index was compared to other countries. For example, Austria in 2011 was 34th on the global ranking and had a score of 0.7165 (out of one) on the Global Gender Index. For both indexes, Japan seems to have no significant improvement in providing opportunities for women. The Global Gender Index percentage increased by about 0.25 percent under Yoshihiko Noda’s term (2011-2012). The Economic Participation and Opportunity Index did not do much better, only increasing by about 1.5 percent under this same timeline. Even though these results showed some improvement in Japanese womens’ favor, these changes were not enough. Thus, this is deemed a “failure” under this study, since it's below a 40% increase. The data also shows that their global ranking for both indexes have not had a significant increase

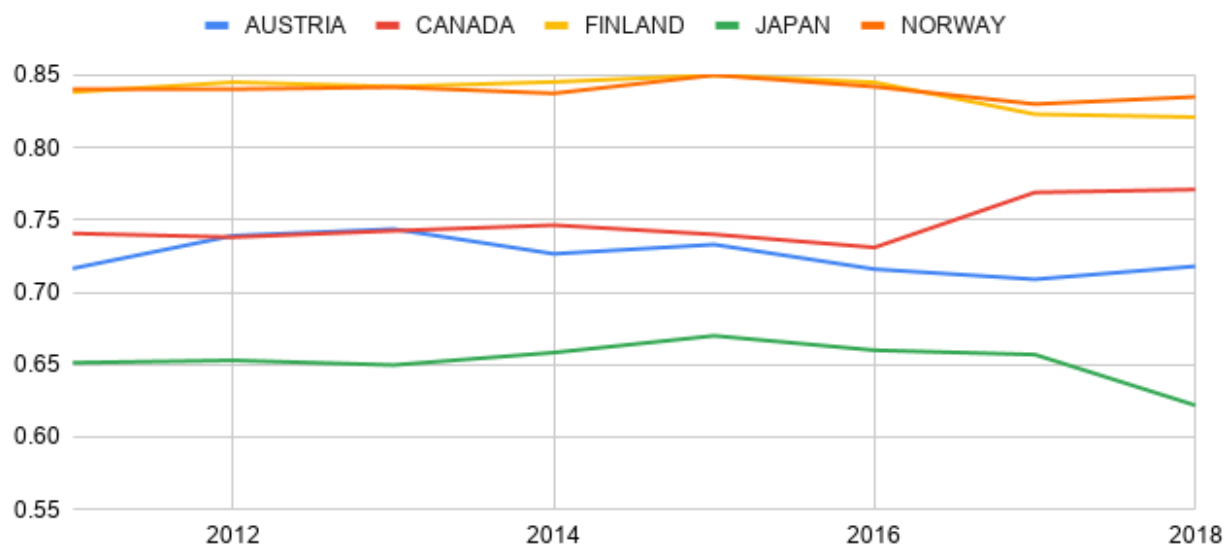
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<sup>23</sup> Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office. (2016) The Intensive Policy to Accelerate the Empowerment of Women 2016 (Decided by the Headquarters for Creating a Society in which All Women Shine). 1-2.

during this time. From all of this, we can conclude that not much progress was made for gender equality under Yoshihiko Noda's legislation. After analyzing the data under Shinzo Abe's term on the table (2013-2018), the results are not much better. In fact, for the Global Gender Index, Japan had a decrease in their score by four percent. The Economic Participation and Opportunity Index also had an increase of about 1.9 percent. This, again, shows that the laws for gender equality have not had a big impact on improving Japanese women's opportunities. In fact, we have seen that these laws have made some of the situations worse.

	2011	2012	2013	2014 (out of 142)	2015 (out of 145)	2016 (out of 144)	2017	2018
<b>AUSTRIA</b>	0.7165, 34	0.7391, 20	0.7437, 19	0.7266, 36	0.733, 37	0.716, 52	0.709, 57	0.718, 53
<b>CANADA</b>	0.7407, 18	0.7381, 21	0.7425, 20	0.7464, 19	0.740, 30	0.731, 35	0.769, 16	0.771, 16
<b>FINLAND</b>	0.8383, 3	0.8451, 2	0.8421, 2	0.8453, 2	0.850, 3	0.845, 2	0.823, 3	0.821, 4
<b>JAPAN</b>	0.6514, 98	0.6530, 101	0.6498, 105	0.6584, 104	0.670, 101	0.660, 111	0.657, 114	0.622, 110
<b>NORWAY</b>	0.8404, 2	0.8403, 3	0.8417, 3	0.8374, 3	0.850, 2	0.842, 3	0.830, 2	0.835, 2

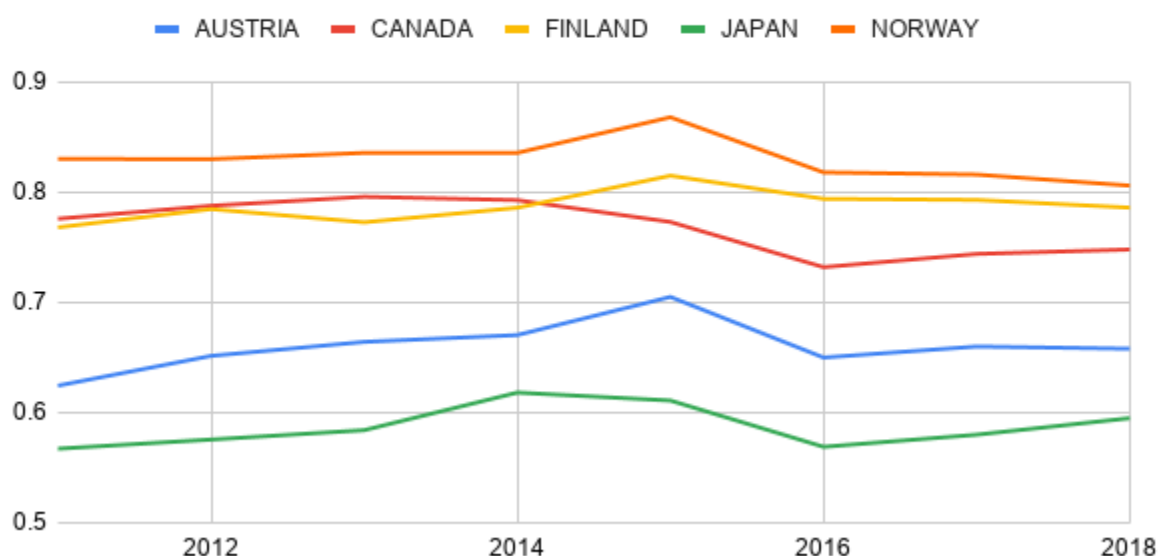
### GLOBAL GENDER INDEX (2011-2018)



Global Gender Index Results from 2011-2018.

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
AUSTRIA	0.6245, 77	0.6515, 70	0.6642, 69	0.6704, 68	0.705, 52	0.650, 84	0.660, 80	0.658, 81
CANADA	0.7759, 10	0.7877, 12	0.7959, 9	0.7928, 17	0.773, 28	0.732, 36	0.744, 29	0.748, 27
FINLAND	0.7681, 12	0.7847, 14	0.7727, 19	0.7859, 21	0.815, 8	0.794, 16	0.793, 16	0.786, 17
JAPAN	0.5673, 100	0.5756, 102	0.5841, 104	0.6182, 102	0.611, 106	0.569, 118	0.580, 114	0.595, 117
NORWAY	0.8302, 5	0.8300, 4	0.8357, 1	0.8357, 2	0.868, 1	0.818, 7	0.816, 8	0.806, 11

## ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION & OPPORTUNITY INDEX (2011-2018)



Economic Participation and Opportunity Index Results, 2011-2018.

To compare Japan's opportunity estimates for women to men, I also needed to choose countries to compare these data sets to. Fortunately, with the available data, it was simple to compare these other countries on the same graph. To select the countries that would be compared to Japan, I decided to look at countries that were also part of the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD). This international organization has many goals, including promoting "prosperity, equality, opportunity, and wellbeing for all."<sup>24</sup> As of now, the organization technically has thirty-seven countries (including Japan) that actively participate. To

<sup>24</sup> "The OECD Creates Better Policies for Better Lives. Read the OECD's Main Figures to Find out More about Their Work." OECD. Accessed February 2, 2021.

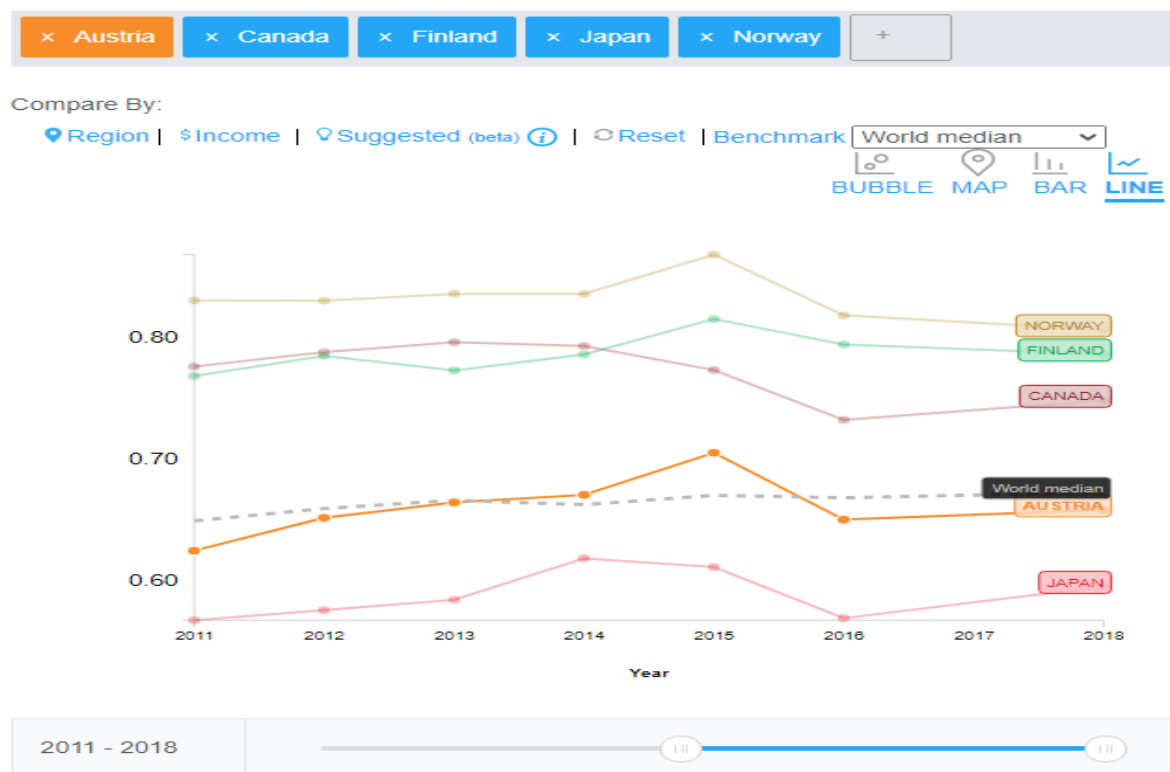
eliminate bias within the data set, I decided to randomize which countries would be selected to compare to Japan. I did this by numbering the countries, which were listed in alphabetical order. Then, using a random number generator from Google, I selected the first four countries that came up. If Japan was selected using the generator, I would not count it and just draw again. Through this system, the countries that ended up being picked were Norway (27), Canada (4), Finland (10), and Austria (2). When including Japan's data, these are the countries displayed on the line graph below.

### *Results*

This data shows that Japan's recent legislation has not made drastic improvements for Japanese women in Japanese society. More needs to be done by the Japanese government to make these changes. I do think that Shinzo Abe's tactic of listening to the wants of Japanese women is a step forward. However, the legislation that is created to combat these issues needs to be enforced. Unfortunately, these results (when looking at the domestic level) was what I expected to find. In some of the previous sections (the Literature Review and Theory), I mentioned that many scholars believed that Shinzo's policies would not bring the changes needed for gender equality across all sectors. Plus, many of the laws I previously mentioned were recommended, not enforced. I originally hypothesized that the Japanese government's impact on gender relations needed to be less divisive and more enforced for change to occur. Because of this, I do believe that my hypothesis was partially correct. For the legislation that was successfully passed by the Cabinet, changes that were being discussed for these laws were not changed fast enough. Shinzo Abe (and his policies regarding gender equality) was seen as the hope for many Japanese women to improve future legislation. With this perspective alone, anyone can assume before looking at the data that previous prime ministers (like Yoshihiko

Noda) had little success in this area as well. The Japanese government's tactics for handling these issues need to be addressed and corrected for more effective changes to be made.

**Austria** experienced a year-on-year average growth rate of **1.99%** for the time period **2009 to 2018**. Among the selected countries, **Austria** has the highest year-on-year average growth rate at **1.99%** whereas **Canada** has the lowest year-on-year average growth rate at **-0.58%**.



Global Gender Economic Participation and Opportunity Index (2011-2018).

## Conclusion

It is clear to see that Japan's policies (regarding women's employment and rights) have not been very effective, regardless of which political party was in control. Not only did these cases in the study "fail" the requirements, they did so drastically. This definitely shows that Japan needs to use different strategies and plan future legislation around that. I, and many other scholars, believe that future, gender equality-centered legislation would be more effective if it

was created in response to Japanese women's feedback. I think a crucial reason why so much of the previous legislation failed is because they have not taken their responses into account. Shinzo Abe's Abenomics policies (including the gender-equality legislation) were mainly targeting Japan's economic issues. This is only one example, but I have not encountered previous Japanese legislation that utilized the female perspective. One reason for this could be that the Cabinet (the main government body of Japan) has only had twenty-six female members. This leaves little room for female representation in executive decisions. Working Japanese women have been vocal about their concerns and hopes for change, especially through the use of social media. If different strategies for future legislation are not put in place, little progress will be made for solving these issues. Some of these issues, if left uncared for completely, can worsen and spread to other sectors of the Japanese government.

If we compare Japan's results from this study to other "developed" nations, Japan is still located at the bottom of the list. The previous research and analysis samples that I encountered showed that the Japanese legislation passed in recent years has had little effectiveness. Having access to this knowledge beforehand led me to assume that these results would appear. However, this assumption was based on Japan's results on the domestic level. It was intriguing to see that Japan's results were very low when compared to other countries, especially other "developed" nations. As a "developed" nation, many scholars would assume that Japan has a somewhat progressive stance on gender issues and gender equality. In actuality, as we can see from the data, Japan's overall average also fell below the world median average for both indexes.

This information has forced me to analyze my research question further: To what extent has Japan's shrinking workforce population been affected by gender roles? From this study, we have seen that the social divisions behind gender and gender roles are presented in almost every

environment, whether intentional or not. Specifically from the case of the workforce, many of the Japanese men are placed in prominent positions. Whereas, Japanese women are rarely placed in these roles. This, again, leaves few opportunities for women to freely voice their opinions and demand for change. Thus, I believe that these policies need to incorporate Japanese women's input to be more effective. In addition to this, future gender equality-based legislation needs to be passed quickly and effectively enforced. I believe that a main reason for population shrinkage in Japan is because of the "social divisions" between Japanese men and women. As I stated previously, Japanese women are often given the difficult task to balance familial duties and their jobs. This could definitely be a deterrent for Japanese women to start families while maintaining a career. This could be a potential reason for the birth rate (and, consequently, the Japanese workforce) to shrink over time. Therefore, if Japanese women were given more support in balancing these tasks (like more established childcare services and less peer-pressure regarding dedication to their jobs), I think that women would feel more comfortable in the workforce environment. As a result of this, Japanese women would most likely be more "motivated" to start a family while maintaining their career. If this balance and support is established, I believe this could be a potential factor in increasing Japan's birth rate.

For the other countries that are watching this happen in Japan, this occurrence can also be a teaching moment. Even the most "developed" countries can still be plagued with unexpected issues and have different societal ideas. It can be surprising to most that these issues regarding women's treatment in the workforce is not only limited to Japan. In fact, many other Asian countries (both deemed "developing" and "developed" countries) have the same issues. Of course, this varies because each country also has other factors that affect these issues. However, the overall idea of the issue is still prominent. I think that this situation could force many



Western countries to look at Japan with a more apprehensive viewpoint. This also shows that women's rights, even in terms of the workplace, still have a long way to go. Even though the human race has made progress in this field, there is still a lot of work that needs to be done. There are still many countries that do not give women equal opportunities in many other circumstances besides the workplace environment. Most of the time, we also see that issues regarding equality are often reflected in cultural and societal practices worldwide. This plays a role into why these legislations can still be virtually ineffective and be a very slow process. If we want women to have an equal chance, we need to keep pushing for better legislation and change societal attitudes. This is the best chance we have at creating the effective changes needed to fix these issues.

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